

always in a majority, and we do not doubt that most of the Christian priests were of like mind with their flock in taking a less heroic but far more common-sense view. It is also to be noted that the practical Roman temper speedily modified the extravagances of the eastern fanatics, and the asceticism of monks and nuns living in religious communities in the midst of their fellow-citizens, and working to heal their bodies as well as to save their souls, stands on a very different plane from the entirely self-centred eremitism associated with Egypt. By doing the work of good Samaritans the members of these communities acted the part of good citizens. Succeeding Emperors, whose Christianity was unimpeachable, looked with cold suspicion on the recluses of the deserts. Valens, for example, regarding their retirement as an evasion of their civic duties, published an edict ordering that they should be brought back; Theodosius with cynical wisdom said that as they had deliberately chosen to dwell in the desert, he would take care that they stopped there. But it is easy to exaggerate the influence wielded by extreme men, whose doctrines and professions only emerge from obscurity because of their extravagances. We must not, therefore, lay too much stress on the constant exhortations to celibacy and virginity which we find even in the writings of such men as Jerome and Ambrose. However zealously they plied the pitchfork, human nature just as persistently came back, and the extraordinary outspokenness of Jerome, for example, in his letters to girls who had pledged